

Q. Well, I'm wondering, looking back at the campaign and previous campaigns, do you think that it's been harder to pull the country together after the election by making such partisan attacks about national security?

The President. Richard, I do believe they care about the security. I don't—I thought they were wrong not making sure our professionals had the tools, and I still believe that. I don't see how you can protect the country unless you give these professionals tools. They just have a different point of view. That doesn't mean they don't—want America to get attacked. That's why I said what I said.

Yes, Jackson [David Jackson, Dallas Morning News].

Immigration Reform

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. On immigration, many Democrats had more positive things to say about your comprehensive proposal than many Republicans did. Do you think a Democratic Congress gives you a better shot at comprehensive immigration reform?

The President. You know, I should have brought this up. I do. I think we have a good chance. And thank you. It's an important issue, and I hope we can get something done on it. I meant to put that in my list of things that we need to get done.

I would hope Republicans have recognized that we've taken very strong security measures to address one aspect of comprehensive immigration reform. And I was talking to Secretary Chertoff today; he thinks that these measures we're taking are beginning to have measurable effects and that catch-and-release has virtually been ended over the last couple of months. And that's positive.

And that's what some Members were concerned about prior to advancing a comprehensive bill. In other words, they said, "Show me progress on the border, and then we'll be interested in talking about other aspects." Well, there's progress being made on the border in terms of security, and I would hope we can get something done. It's a vital issue. It's an issue that—there's an issue where I believe we can find some common ground with the Democrats.

Q. What are the odds for a guest-worker provision?

The President. Well, that's got to be an integral part of a comprehensive plan. When you're talking comprehensive immigration reform, one part of it is a guest-worker program, where people can come on a temporary basis to do jobs Americans are not doing. I've always felt like that would be an important aspect of securing the border. In other words, if somebody is not trying to sneak in in the first place, it makes—decreases the work load on our Border Patrol and lets the Border Patrol focus on drugs and guns and terrorists. But that's a—I appreciate you bringing that up. I should have remembered it.

Listen, thank you all very much for your time. I appreciate your interest.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad; and Gov. Edward G. Rendell and Senator-elect Bob Casey of Pennsylvania.

Remarks on the Resignation of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and the Nomination of Robert M. Gates To Be Secretary of Defense

November 8, 2006

The President. Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House. Earlier today I announced my intent to nominate Robert Gates to be the next Secretary of the Defense, and now I'm pleased to introduce him to the American people. I also am looking forward to paying tribute to the man he will succeed.

America remains a nation at war. We face brutal enemies who despise our freedom and want to destroy our way of life. These enemies attacked our country on September the 11th, 2001. They fight us in Afghanistan and Iraq, and they remain determined to attack our country again. Against such enemies, there's only one way to protect the American people: We must stay on the offense and bring our enemies to justice before they hurt us again.

In this time of war, the President relies on the Secretary of Defense to provide military advice and direct our Nation's Armed Forces as they engage our enemies across the world. The Secretary of Defense must be a man of vision who can see threats still over the horizon and prepare our Nation to meet them. Bob Gates is the right man to meet both of these critical challenges.

Bob is one of our Nation's most accomplished public servants. He joined the CIA in 1966 and has nearly 27 years of national security experience, serving six Presidents of both political parties. He spent nearly 9 years serving on the National Security Council staff. And at the CIA, he rose from an entry-level employee to become the Director of the Central Intelligence. And his experience has prepared him well for this new assignment.

Bob understands the challenges we face in Afghanistan. As President Reagan's Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, he helped lead America's efforts to drive Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Success in these efforts weakened the Soviet regime and helped hasten freedom's victory in the cold war.

Bob understands the challenges facing our Nation in Iraq. He served as Deputy National Security Adviser to the first President Bush during Operation Desert Storm, as American troops repelled Iraqi aggression and drove Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait. More recently, he served as a member of the Iraq Study Group, a distinguished independent panel of Republicans and Democrats led by former Secretary of State Jim Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton. As part of this commission, he has traveled to Iraq and met with the country's leaders and our military commanders on the ground. He'll provide the Department with a fresh perspective and new ideas on how America can achieve our goals in Iraq.

Bob understands how to lead large, complex institutions and transform them to meet new challenges. As Director of Central Intelligence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, he was responsible for leading all the foreign intelligence agencies of the United States. And he's brought that same leadership and abilities as his work as president of our Nation's sixth largest university, Texas

A&M. When the A&M board of regents interviewed him for the job, he described himself as an agent of change. As president, he delivered on that promise, initiating wide-ranging reforms to almost every aspect of campus life. He'll bring that same transformational spirit to his work in the Department of Defense.

Bob Gates is a patriot whose love for country was nurtured in the Kansas community where he was raised. He's worn our Nation's uniform. He's a strategic thinker who was educated at three of America's finest universities, receiving his bachelor's degree from William & Mary, a master's degree in history from Indiana University, and a doctorate in Russian and Soviet history from Georgetown.

He's a leader in the business community who served on the boards of several major corporations. He's a man of integrity, candor, and sound judgment. He knows that the challenge of protecting our country is larger than any political party, and he has a record of working with leaders of both sides of the aisle to strengthen our national security. He has my confidence and my trust, and he will be an outstanding Secretary of Defense.

Bob follows in the footsteps of one of America's most skilled and capable national security leaders, Donald Rumsfeld. Don is the longest serving member of my Cabinet, and next month he will reach another milestone when he becomes the longest serving Secretary of Defense in the history of our Nation. I appreciate his willingness to continue serving until his successor is in place, because in a time of war, our Nation cannot be without a strong and steady hand leading our Department of Defense.

Don has served in times of great consequence for our Nation. Few will forget the image of Don Rumsfeld as he helped rescue workers carry the victims from the rubble of the Pentagon on September the 11th, 2001. In the weeks that followed, he directed the effort to plan our Nation's military response to an unprecedented attack on our soil. Under his leadership, U.S. and coalition forces launched one of the most innovative military campaigns in the history of modern warfare, driving the Taliban and its Al Qaida allies from power in a matter of weeks.

In 2003, on my orders, he led the planning and execution of another historic military campaign, Operation Iraqi Freedom, that drove Saddam Hussein from power and helped the Iraqi people establish a constitutional democracy in the heart of the Middle East. History will record that on Don Rumsfeld's watch, the men and women of our military overthrew two terrorist regimes, liberated some 50 million people, brought justice to the terrorist Zarqawi and scores of senior Al Qaida operatives, and helped stop new terrorist attacks on our people.

America is safer and the world is more secure because of the service and the leadership of Donald Rumsfeld. As he led the Pentagon in an unprecedented war, Don never took his eye off another vital responsibility: preparing America for the threats that await us as this new century unfolds. He developed a new defense strategy. He established a new Northern Command to protect the homeland, a new Joint Forces Command to focus on transformation, a new Strategic Command to defend against long-range attack, and transformed the U.S. Special Operations Command for the war on terror.

He led our efforts to create a new NATO Response Force that allows NATO to deploy rapidly anywhere in the world. He undertook the most sweeping transformation of America's global force posture since the end of World War II. He revitalized America's efforts to develop and deploy ballistic missile defenses, and led a comprehensive review of America's nuclear forces that has allowed us to undertake dramatic reductions in offensive nuclear weapons.

Don's work in these areas did not often make the headlines. But the reforms that he has set in motion are historic, and they will enhance the security of the American people for decades to come.

Over the past 6 years, I've relied on Don Rumsfeld's advice and counsel. I've come to know his character and his integrity. As the Secretary of Defense, he has been dedicated to his mission, loyal to his President, and devoted to the courageous men and women of our Armed Forces.

Don once famously said, "There are known knowns; there are known unknowns; and there are unknown unknowns." Well,

Mr. Secretary, here is a known known: Your service has made America stronger and made America a safer nation. You will be missed, and I wish you and Joyce all the best in the years to come.

Don Rumsfeld is a tough act to follow. That's why I picked a man of Bob Gates's caliber to succeed him. When confirmed by the Senate, Bob will bring talent, energy, and innovation to the Department of Defense. He'll work every day to keep the American people safe and to make our Nation more secure. And he'll do a superb job as America's next Secretary of Defense.

Bob, I appreciate you agreeing to serve our Nation again, and congratulations.

[At this point, Secretary-designate Gates and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld made brief remarks.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Joyce Rumsfeld, wife of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary-designate Gates and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on Israeli Airstrike in Gaza

November 8, 2006

The United States is deeply saddened by the injuries and loss of life in Gaza today. We send our condolences to the families of all those affected. We have seen the Israeli Government's apology and understand an investigation has begun. We hope it will be completed quickly and that appropriate steps will be taken to avoid a repetition of this tragic incident. We call on all parties to act with care and restraint so as to avoid any harm to innocent civilians.